

News Release

Pasque Flower – First in the Spring, First Ever in the Youngquist Prairie at UMC

By Dan Svedarsky on Monday, April 24, 2006

CROOKSTON, MN (April 24, 2006) – The pasque flower is making an appearance for the first time in the Youngquist Prairie Garden at the University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC). Located just outside the “Prairie Room” of the new Student Center, the garden is welcoming its first spring since native prairie plants were put in last fall by UMC students led by Natural Resources Department Head Dan Svedarsky. Community members are encouraged to stop by UMC for a look.

Established in fall of 2005, the Prairie Garden is divided into three unique sections to represent the spectrum of conditions found in the Northern Great Plains: dry, mesic (or moist), and wet prairie. The pasque is the first flower to make an entrance.

A sure sign of spring across much of the northern prairies, the pasque is already in full flower on the dry prairie. Pasque flower is one of the first native flowers to bloom after the snowmelt. They prefer dry prairies, especially gravelly hilltops and south-facing slopes where vegetation is low and sparse. Pasque flower stalks, growing between 2 and 6 inches tall, are densely covered in silky hairs that protect the plants from spring frosts and occasional late snowfall. A spring walk on a gravelly prairie reveals sprinkles of light blue petals with yellow clusters of stamens. The flowers generally finish flowering by the end of April and produce feathery extensions of seeds in mid-May which are dispersed by the wind.

The name “pasque” comes from the French word for Easter, indicating that the plants are often in flower at this time of year. They are unique – sending up flowers even before they develop leaves. The state flower of South Dakota and provincial flower of Manitoba, the plant has many names: "prairie smoke" (also applied to another prairie wildflower), “May flower,” and "prairie crocus." The genus name, Anemone, actually means wind flower. The species name, patens, means spreading, or literally, "spread by the wind." The latter name may have been applied by early settlers who had planted domestic Crocus in Europe and noted that they were the first to pop up in the spring. The Lakota name, "hosi' cekpa," translates as "child's navel" and is descriptive of the unopened flower buds resembling a newborn's navel before it heals. Melvin Gilmore, in his book, Prairie Smoke, claims that people of the Arikara Nation would sometimes include pasque flowers in a springtime ceremony. The story goes that a holy cedar tree was floated down the Missouri River carrying worn-out baby moccasins and pasque flowers to notify down stream villages that the Nation was still alive and well.

Varieties of pasque flowers are widespread in North America in open areas, even in the tundra and in mountain meadows up to 10,000 feet. The plant also grows in limestone pastures in central and northern Europe and open areas of Russia. Greek legend has it that it sprang from the tears of Venus and the early physician, Dioscorides recommended its use for cataracts and other ailments.

UMC's Youngquist Prairie Garden was named to honor Bernie and Bernice Youngquist. Bernie Youngquist, the last superintendent of the Northwest School of Agriculture (the forerunner of UMC) championed the conservation of the prairie and natural history research. Native prairie plantlets were donated by Prairie Restorations, Inc. of Princeton, MN.

For more details on the garden or prairie plants, contact Svedarsky at 218-281-8129 (dsvedars@umcrookston.edu).

The University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) is a four-year baccalaureate degree granting institution, celebrating 100 years of excellence in education, research and outreach. To learn more, visit www.UMCrookston.edu.

Natural history notes were provided by UMC Student Luke Wittkop, Hugo, MN, who will begin work with Prairie Restorations, Inc. after graduation in May 2006.

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